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Goldsby's Golden Giants**

Mark E. Eberle

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Cover image: Cabinet card produced from photographs taken by George Downing in April 1887 of the minor league baseball club in Topeka, Kansas known as Goldsby's Golden Giants (the 3 G's), champions of the Western League.

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Topeka Enters the Minor Leagues, 1886–1887: Bud Fowler and Goldsby’s Golden Giants

Mark E. Eberle

Beginning in 1865 with the Frontier Base Ball Club (BBC) in Leavenworth, teams were organized in most Kansas towns at some point during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Clubs composed of businessowners and others who could enjoy leisure activities on workday afternoons soon gave way to town teams, and in some instances, amateur teams gave way to semipro teams.¹

Twenty years after the Frontiers participated in the first intercity matches with clubs in Kansas City, the first professional minor league teams represented cities in Kansas when Leavenworth and Topeka became members of the Western League in 1886 (Table 1). The league and some of its teams struggled financially, but they featured talented players, such as Jake Beckley and Charles “Kid” Nichols, who would both be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame.²

Topeka’s first two years of minor league baseball were noteworthy. The 1886 Topeka BBC was an integrated team. The 1887 Goldsby’s Golden Giants was arguably one of the best minor league teams of the nineteenth century. The stories of these two baseball clubs have been told in bits and pieces,³ but they warrant a fuller recounting of their histories.

Prologue

The first baseball clubs in Topeka were organized in 1867. The most prominent of these was the Shawnee BBC, which played games with clubs from Lawrence and Manhattan, as well as among its own members. These first clubs were composed of businessowners and

Table 1.—Cities represented in minor league baseball’s Western League in 1885–1888. The name has been used periodically by other minor leagues since the 1890s.

1885	1886	1887	1888
Cleveland, OH	Denver, CO	Denver, CO	Denver, CO
Indianapolis, IN	Leadville, CO	Emporia, KS •	Hutchinson, KS
Kansas City, MO	Leavenworth, KS	Hastings, NE	Leavenworth, KS
Milwaukee, WI	Lincoln, NE	Kansas City, MO	Lincoln, NE
Omaha, NE/Keokuk, IA	St. Joseph, MO	Leavenworth, KS	Newton, KS
Toledo, OH	Topeka, KS	Lincoln, NE	
		Omaha, NE	
		St. Joseph, MO	
		Topeka, KS	
		Wichita, KS •	

• In 1887, Wichita and Emporia were mid-season replacements for Leavenworth and St. Joseph, respectively. Both Emporia and Wichita folded in September before the season closed.

others with flexible work schedules. They were as much social clubs as they were baseball clubs, and intercity competition was often associated with a banquet provided by the host club. Exercise provided by regular practices and intramural games was seen as the primary function of these clubs.⁴ At one intramural contest, the Shawnee's first baseman made an unusual catch. While they played on the south side of the Capitol Square, a pair of "gay and sportive mules, attached to a light wagon, concluded to run off ... at full speed." As the runaway team crossed the grounds, the first baseman "caught the mules on the fly."⁵

With Topeka's first minor league clubs in mind, perhaps the most relevant baseball note in 1867 was an opinion published by Topeka's *Kansas State Record* on Christmas Day.

We see it stated that the National Base-Ball Players' Convention, at its recent session in Philadelphia, adopted a rule which provides that "no Club composed of persons of color, or having in its membership persons of color, shall be admitted into the Association." If the Association had adopted another rule, to exclude all but the bigoted and conceited fools who voted for such a measure, it would have done the "National game" great service.⁶

The Shawnee BBC was less active in 1868 and 1869 but began 1870 with renewed determination. Members who missed meetings or practices were subject to a fine of 25¢. The ball grounds were now near the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe depot, which the Shawnees shared with the Western BBC, composed of younger players. Segregation was the rule of the day, and teams of African American ballplayers also organized in Topeka that year. The Shawnees opened the season by defeating the Westerns in April. Then the Shawnee BBC ceased practice until a meeting was called in July to reorganize the club. Their return to the diamond was short lived, as they were defeated by the Western BBC. However, the big event on the diamond in Topeka that year was a game in May between the top club in the state, the Kaw Valley BBC of Lawrence, and the Forest City BBC of Rockford, Illinois, featuring pitcher Albert Spalding. The Forest Citys won easily, 41-6.⁷

Organized baseball clubs did not take the field every season in these early years, but from 1870 through 1882, the Western BBC was the primary focus of baseball fans in Topeka. After supplanting the Shawnee BBC, they had even scheduled winter practice games in December 1870 and February 1871. In addition to games with regional clubs, the Westerns hosted contests in 1875 with a club from Quincy, Illinois and 2 of the 13 teams in the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players—the St. Louis Red Stockings and St. Louis Brown Stockings.* The visitors won all three games, which surprised no one, but it brought attention to the Topeka club. The 1879 Western BBC did not organize until July, but they defeated clubs from Ottawa (Kansas), Wichita, and Kansas City, as well as the St. Louis Mutuals. After the season ended, there was talk of even bigger opportunities for the club.⁸

The Western BBC met in January 1880 to reorganize with the intention of joining a new version the Northwestern League. There was also talk of forming a Missouri Valley League of amateur teams in northeastern Kansas and northwestern Missouri. Alas, neither

* The National Association was a loose confederation of professional teams that operated from 1871 to 1875 before giving way to the more structured National League in 1876.

league was organized. Instead, the Westerns focused their attention on the professional Kansas City BBC. Initially, the team was referred to as the Red Stockings (Reds), but the new managers purchased replacement uniforms in July and the name was changed to the Kansas City Blue Stockings. In June and July, the Westerns lost six games to Kansas City, as well as two games with the professional team from Dubuque, Iowa. This did not sit well with local boosters, so Topeka hired players from other states.* Only two players on the Westerns' roster in 1879 remained with the team in late July 1880. This change brought parity with Kansas City, as the Westerns won four of seven games with the Blues in late July and August. To help cover the expense of having professional players, it became "necessary to charge ladies 25 cents admittance to the games."⁹

Over the next two years, the Western BBC faded. In 1881, they challenged any team to a pair of games at the state fair in Topeka for a purse of \$50 in gold. They were defeated by the Leavenworth Reds in the first game, and cold rain forced cancellation of the second. Of the players on the 1870 team that defeated the Shawnee BBC and the 1875 team that hosted professional clubs from St. Louis, only Hale Ritchie took the field for the Westerns in 1881. Even efforts to properly organize the club diminished. During the game at the state fair, "The Leavenworth boys wore white uniforms with red caps and red stockings. The Westerns were not uniformed." The following year, the club was not reorganized until August, and even Ritchie, "old reliable," was gone. The end was announced in late September. "The Western base ball club has run its course. It is now totally and effectually dead."¹⁰

The next team to represent Topeka was the Capital City BBC, organized the first week of June 1884. William J. Sheard was chosen to serve as manager. The Capital Citys played local teams, such as the Santa Fe (Railroad) BBC. They also played teams from Kansas City and towns in northeastern Kansas, winning nearly all of their games.¹¹ The following year, the Capital Citys started the season at the end of May, losing to Leavenworth and St. Joseph, Missouri. There were several teams within the city that played in Topeka that summer, but intercity baseball went into a season-long torpor for the state capital.¹²

In addition to the various white teams during the 1870s and 1880s, baseball clubs composed of African American players continued to be organized in Topeka. The first mention of the Topeka Independents was in 1872, when they played the Lawrence Moonlights. The Independents were active through 1875. At a game between the Independents and Lawrence Eagles, a member of the Western BBC served as umpire. In 1875, when the Westerns hosted the talented out-of-state teams, the Independents challenged them to a game. The challenge was not accepted, despite some ribbing from the *Topeka Commonwealth* after the Westerns lost to Quincy and the St. Louis Red Stockings.¹³

Would it not now be in order for the Westerns to consider the challenge of the colored Independents? It will not cost one hundred and twenty-five dollars to play them, and it is right that base ball matches, like charity, should begin at home.¹⁴

* One professional player signed by the Western BBC in 1880 was Pennsylvanian Samuel Leech Maskrey, who would return to Topeka to play baseball in 1886.

In the early 1880s, the Modoc BBC composed of African American players took the field in Topeka. In August 1883, they played the Kansas City Black Stockings on the second afternoon of a two-day celebration of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton’s 74th birthday.* The Modoc BBC reorganized in 1884, and in a rare occurrence among early Black baseball clubs in Kansas, the club’s roster and officers were published in local newspapers.¹⁵

The first Black team in Topeka to have numerous newspaper notices published about games and other events was the Topeka Brown Stockings (Browns) of 1885, the year the Capital City BBC essentially took the year off. The Browns were the city’s most active team that summer, playing teams in Topeka, northeastern Kansas, and Kansas City. One game might have been with the Capital City BBC, depending on who told the story. Topeka newspapers reported the contest was between the Browns and “Capital City club,” who imported a professional pitcher and one other player for the game. No box score was published because the game ended abruptly in the eighth inning. The Browns objected to a missed call by the umpire that cost them a run, so they left the field in protest. Officially, the game was a 9–0 forfeit to the Capitals. Complaints about how the game ended led the Capital City’s manager, William Sheard, to respond that the Browns had actually not played the Capital City BBC.¹⁶

So far as the history of the recent match goes, it was understood by the Browns that the Capital Citys were to secure good players[;] in other words they were to play a picked nine and to do this it was necessary to send away for two players, not being able to secure the nine in Topeka. In this connection I desire to say that the Capital Citys did not play last Saturday, but a picked nine and as such it should have been denominated.¹⁷

Looking back over several decades of history, this explanation actually raises more questions than it answers. On the one hand, the Capital City BBC was essentially inactive in 1885. However, seven of the team’s players were willing to play the Browns. With several local teams playing in 1885, why was it not possible to find two local players to fill spots on the roster? Baseball clubs of the time typically carried few extra players on their rosters, which meant the absence of players occasionally required the use of substitutes. However, the excuse that a missing player or two had to be replaced had long been used to defend a white baseball club that lost to a Black team—the white team was actually not the official baseball club.¹⁸ Information about the contest in July 1885 is insufficient to clearly understand the truth of the situation. Yet, the color line on Topeka baseball diamonds would look decidedly different in 1886.

* Singleton was born a slave in Tennessee in 1809 and escaped to Canada in 1846. During the late 1870s, he helped former slaves emigrate from Tennessee to Kansas. Many people contributed to the organization of groups leaving the South during this exodus, but Singleton became one of its best-known representatives, even testifying before a US Senate committee. After expenses for the 1883 celebration in Topeka were paid, the remaining \$247.25 were presented to Singleton as a gift. He later moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where he passed away in 1900 (Entz 2003).

Topeka Base Ball Club, 1886

In January 1886, Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Omaha were all considering membership in two leagues. One path would place professional teams from all three cities in a Northwestern League, which might also include clubs from Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul in Minnesota. Meanwhile, Kansas City was also competing with Milwaukee and Indianapolis to fill a vacancy for a western club in the National League. While these discussions were underway, a meeting was held in St. Joseph on January 17 to organize the Western League. It was originally envisioned as the Missouri Valley League, with teams from Leavenworth, Topeka, Lincoln, Omaha, and St. Joseph. However, clubs from Denver and Leadville in Colorado were also represented at the meeting. Omaha rejected membership in the league, leaving six clubs. This simplified matters for the remaining clubs, because an even number of teams was preferred for scheduling purposes. The primary reason given by Omaha boosters for rejecting membership was that travel to Colorado was too expensive, even though the league negotiated discounted fares for the teams. "Besides there will be too many one-horse towns in the league." With the Western League established, Kansas City prevailed in the competition to join the National League in February, and teams from Minnesota and Wisconsin organized a geographically more compact Northwestern League in March.¹⁹ Omaha remained a team without a league that season.

Although Topeka had agreed to join the Western League in January, organizing the local baseball association proved challenging. The initial meetings were called in early January, shortly before the league meeting was held in St. Joseph. However, cold weather prevented many supporters from attending the local meetings. A temporary association was finally organized on March 13. Committees were set up to establish a stock company, write a constitution and bylaws, arrange for grounds, and other matters. Players were quickly signed. There was no time to waste. Representatives of the league planned to meet in Leavenworth on March 27 to finalize their organization and set a schedule. Each team would play 40 games at home and 40 on the road, plus any exhibition games they chose to arrange.²⁰ Amidst this flurry of activity, the former manager of the Capital City BBC, William Sheard, who ran the newsstand at the Windsor Hotel in Topeka, became Vice President of the Western League as well as the (business) manager of the Topeka BBC.* David Mulvane was elected president of the local baseball association.²¹

The baseball association in Topeka met again on March 30 to report on progress. Arrangements were made to build a ballpark on Lane Street north of present-day Willow Avenue (a continuation of Fourth Street). Streetcars on Sixth Street would stop about two blocks from the ballpark entrance. A wooden grandstand and a fence eight feet tall enclosing the grounds were constructed. Advertisements were painted on the fence in sections 25 feet long. Seating capacity of the amphitheatre was estimated to be 500 spectators, who would be charged 25¢ admission. Other crews prepared the field, which included scalping the diamond of sod. Uniforms of gray flannel with Yale blue trim and stockings were ordered

* Although recent sources refer to the team as the Topeka Capitals (or Topeka Capitols), that name was never used in Topeka newspapers during 1886 for the Western League club, which served to distinguish it from the earlier Capital City BBC.

from A.G. Spalding and Company. Despite these preparations, the process of fundraising for the stock company progressed so slowly that it caused concern.²²

The process of signing players from across the continent began in earnest and would continue during the season. Strong players were retained, and those who were weak or unreliable were replaced. Ten of the 23 Topeka players had played or would play in the major leagues, though most of their careers at that level were brief.²³ Despite the signings and releases, eight players formed the core of the club through the season (Table 2). Benjamin Sullivan began the season as the team's captain, but John Fogarty took on that role after Sullivan was released in early June. Ren Deagle was made Fogarty's assistant.²⁴

One of the first players signed by Topeka was John W. Jackson Jr., who played baseball under the name Bud Fowler. Why he chose to use the name Fowler is unknown, but he became well known under that pseudonym during a career that lasted from the 1870s to 1909. Fowler is credited with being the first professional baseballist who openly played as an African American for an integrated minor league or major league club. The first such

Table 2.—Players on the minor league Topeka Base Ball Club of the Western League in 1886 taken from box scores. Players marked (•) were on the roster for essentially the entire season, although William “Buck” (“Farmer”) Weaver played for the independent team in Abilene, Kansas about five weeks in July and August. Several players had played or would play for major league teams.

Player	Position	Major Leagues
Al Bauer		1884, 1886
Charley Blanchard		
M.J. Bradley		
John “Roxy” Burchard		
David Butler •	SS	
Lorenzo “Ren” Deagle •	1B	1883–1884
Frank Fahey		
James “Mikado” Flynn •	OF/3B	
John “Jack” Fogarty •	OF	1885
John W. Jackson (“Bud Fowler”) •	2B	
George Haddock		1888–1894
P. Jacob “Jack” Kenyon •	C	
S. Leech Maskrey		1882–1886
Jim McElroy		1884
William “Billy” Miles		
Henry Moore		1884
William Motz		
John “Jack” Pettiford •	P	
Thomas Shaughnessy		
Harry Smith		1877, 1889
Benjamin Sullivan		
William B. Weaver •	OF/C	1888–1894
Milt Whitehead		1884

club was the Lynn (Massachusetts) Live Oaks in 1878 (Table 3). Several more followed into the 1890s, when the color line barring Black players from organized baseball became absolute for nearly half a century. Fowler was not the only African American to play on early minor league clubs, but in addition to being the first, he did so across a longer span of years than any other player. His later career included playing for or organizing segregated clubs and organizing (or attempting to organize) leagues of Black clubs through the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁵ The inclusion of Fowler on the roster at second base for the Topeka BBC meant that William Sheard, who had rejected the claim that the Capital City BBC had been defeated by the Topeka Browns a few months earlier, was now the manager of an integrated professional baseball club.

Despite being one of the prominent ballplayers of the nineteenth century, we are still learning new information about Fowler's life and career from increasingly available contemporary sources.²⁶ For example, Fowler reportedly played for the Portland, Maine club in the Eastern New England League in 1885,²⁷ but a check of box scores in the *Portland Daily Press* recently posted online did not include him.* Similarly, a newspaper story published in November 1904 stated that Fowler had managed a team of Black ballplayers that summer

Table 3.—Minor league baseball clubs for which John W. Jackson Jr. (“Bud Fowler”) is known to have played.

Year	City	League
1878	Lynn/Worcester, Massachusetts	International Association
1884	Stillwater, Minnesota	Northwestern League
1885	Keokuk, Iowa Pueblo, Colorado	Western League Colorado State League
1886	Topeka, Kansas	Western League
1887	Binghamton, New York Montpelier, Vermont	International League Northeastern League
1888	Crawfordsville/Terre Haute, Indiana Santa Fe, New Mexico	Central Interstate League New Mexico State League
1889	Greenville, Michigan	Michigan State League
1890	Galesburg, Illinois Sterling, Illinois Galesburg, Illinois/Burlington, Iowa	Central Interstate League Illinois-Iowa League Illinois-Iowa League
1892	Lincoln/Kearney, Nebraska	Nebraska State League
1895	Adrian, Michigan Lansing, Michigan	Michigan State League Michigan State League

* I checked box scores for Fowler in the *Portland (ME) Daily Press* for their club in the Eastern New England League in May, mid-June to mid-August, and September—periods he was not playing for Keokuk, Iowa or Pueblo, Colorado that summer. Fowler was not in any of the box scores for Portland.

named the Kansas City Stars. There were teams with that name during the 1880s and 1890s, mostly composed of white players. However, the only Kansas City Stars confirmed in regional newspapers in 1904 was challenging teams with players 13 or 14 years old.²⁸ Thus, a more detailed look at this baseball pioneer's time in Kansas in 1886 is warranted.

After playing for Pueblo, Colorado at the end of the 1885 season, Fowler remained in Denver. He arrived in Topeka on March 9, before the baseball association was fully organized, and "offered his services to the Topeka team for the coming season."²⁹ Thus, he sought out the opportunity to play for a Western League club, rather than being sought by the clubs. Topeka's slow organization meant it was the most viable opportunity for Fowler in March, and he was known in the region because of his time as a member of the Western League team in Keokuk, Iowa the previous summer.

As he waited for the baseball association to finalize their organization, Fowler engaged in one of his other athletic interests—foot races. On March 16, "Professor Fowler" ran one and one-eighth miles in a race with Fred Jewell, who roller skated two miles at the local rink. Fowler won by "three laps." However, Jewell on skates defeated Fowler on foot in a half-mile "dash." In a story summarizing the races, the *Topeka Capital* identified Fowler as "George W. Fowler, of Wyoming, a professional sprinter and baseball player." None of the newspaper stories thus far had mentioned that Fowler was Black.³⁰ Perhaps he was not as well known in Topeka as might be supposed of someone who showed up to offer his services on the diamond. If true, that would soon change.

Fowler also ran races during the season. One of his opponents in a 100-yard dash was center fielder Charles W. Hall, captain of the Leavenworth club in the Western League. Like Fowler, Hall competed in races in addition to playing professional baseball. The two runners went head-to-head after the fifth inning of a game in Leavenworth between their respective clubs in August for \$10 in prize money. Hall won by about 6 feet.³¹

The Topeka BBC opened its preseason with a series of exhibition games at home against the new National League team from Kansas City on April 7–9. Nearly 700 fans watched the first game, exceeding the capacity of the just completed grandstand at Athletic Park. In addition, the nearby trees were filled with boys watching the game. To no one's surprise, Kansas City easily won all three games against the minor league club organized only a few days earlier and still waiting for players to arrive. The score in the first game was 13–1. Bud Fowler drove in Topeka's lone run in the fourth inning with the team's only extra-base hit, a double. Beyond that, Topeka managed only three singles. According to Topeka's *Kansas State Journal*, "The best playing on the ground this afternoon was by Fowler." The scores of the next two games were equally lopsided, 13–4 and 10–0. The bright spot in game three was also Fowler, as described by the *Topeka Commonwealth*. "Fowler, the colored wonder, was in the box [pitching] during the last two innings and created considerable consternation among the Kansas Citys by his terrible and wonderful delivery, and succeeded in striking out six men in succession."³² Topeka knew who Bud Fowler was now.

In addition to exhibition games with Kansas City, the Topeka BBC played preseason games on April 22 and 23 with the St. Louis Maroons, also a member of the National League. Among the players on the Maroons was Fred Dunlap, who was a popular player considered

to be one of the best second basemen of the nineteenth century. An even better second baseman of the era was an African American by the name of Frank Grant, who coincidentally played his first season of minor league ball in Meridian, Connecticut (Eastern League) and Buffalo, New York (International League) in 1886. Denied the opportunity to play in the major leagues because of his race, Grant was not as widely known as Dunlap, so he was sometimes referred to as the “Black Dunlap.” In April 1886, Bud Fowler played against the white Dunlap (and against Frank Grant in the International League in 1887).³³

As with Kansas City, Topeka lost both games to St. Louis, 13–3 and 12–4. Two days before the series began, Fowler was on his way to the ballpark for practice when he was bitten on his lower leg by a dog. There was concern the painful wound would prevent him from playing,³⁴ but as was his lot as an African American playing in almost entirely segregated baseball leagues, Fowler played through the pain whenever possible. He would suffer his share of injuries—some clearly accidental, some perhaps not—while playing in the Western League.

In the first game with St. Louis, “Fowler, the invincible, ... sent a grass cutter to second, which was so warm that the baseman [Dunlap] dropped it without hesitating, letting the runner to first.” Fowler also took a throw from the pitcher to pick off an inattentive runner at second base. In the defensive match-up between the two second basemen over the ridiculously small sample size of two games, Fowler had three put outs, seven assists, and no or one error (.909 or 1.000). Dunlap had eleven put outs, five assists, and three errors (.842).³⁵ For the entire regular season, however, Dunlap’s fielding percentage on 784 chances in the National League was .926. Fowler’s fielding percentage on 384 chances in the Western League, mostly at second base but also in the outfield, catching, and pitching, was .883.³⁶

The schedule for the Western League teams consisted of 20 four-game series for a total of 80 games. During May, Topeka would alternate two home and two away series, beginning in Leavenworth on May 5. This was a reasonably fair way to begin the season to generate local support for the clubs and the corresponding levels of gate receipts. Playing half the games at home to begin the season, when interest would likely be strong for a reasonably competitive club, could allow the baseball association to place itself on a solid financial foundation capable of sustaining it through the entire season. The teams were also fortunate in that it was not an unusually wet spring, and only a few games were postponed. Canceled games meant lost income, and a rainy spring could wreak havoc with individual teams and entire leagues.

One problem for the league that arose at the beginning of the season was that the home teams provided the umpires. This was seen as a way to avoid additional expenses incurred by hiring independent umpires paid a salary by the league, but it would lead to accusations of bias and excessive arguments (“kicking”) during games. Topeka favored league umpires but was in the minority. A compromise was reached to try the home umpires for a month and revisit the issue. On May 27, the Western League directors met in Leavenworth and agreed to hire a pool of four umpires who would operate under the same rules as National League umpires. They began work the following day. The use of league umpires was a marked improvement, but it did not solve all the officiating problems. Quality could still be

an issue. For example, during the last two games in a four-game series in Topeka with visiting St. Joseph in August, both clubs agreed to have the injured captain of the Topeka BBC, Jack Fogarty, serve as umpire in place of the league umpire, Theodore McEwing. McEwing had pitched for St. Joseph earlier in the season, but both clubs agreed he was a poor umpire. Fogarty gave satisfaction to both teams, and St. Joseph won both games.³⁷

In their first 16 games, Topeka compiled a record of 8–8, which was good enough for second place behind Denver at 13–4. Fowler quickly became a fan favorite in Topeka. His extra-base hits—mostly triples and doubles—were relatively frequent, beginning with the first series in Leavenworth. In addition, his fielding could be stellar, but he also committed his share of errors. Nevertheless, Fowler’s fielding percentage of .883 on 384 chances that season was relatively good for the Western League. Of the league’s second basemen with more than 100 chances, the top two fielding percentages were those of Leadville’s Charlie R. Briggs at .896 on 240 chances and Lincoln’s Albert Swift at .891 on 330 chances. St. Joseph’s Oliver “Patsy” Tebeau, a future major league player, stood at .875 on 379 chances.³⁸

Fowler was also appreciated for the cleverness he occasionally displayed within the rules of the game. In a close contest with Leadville on May 17, Fowler scored the first run for Topeka. He drove the ball to the fence in right field and made it safely to third base. Leadville immediately raised an argument with the umpire regarding some perceived irregularity with Fowler’s baserunning. What they specifically claimed he had done was not mentioned in the Topeka newspapers, but it was not unusual for runners to cut bases short, sometimes coming nowhere near the base. As the Leadville players argued their case, Fowler quietly came down the baseline to score while the Leadville catcher was “napping.” In the bottom of the ninth inning, Leadville led 4–1, but Topeka quickly scored two runs. With two outs and a runner on base, Fowler came to the plate to the wild cheers of the home crowd. “Twenty dollars for a home run!” Instead, Fowler grounded out to the second baseman, ending the game.³⁹ The fates of baseball (and the fans) are fickle, but the season is long.

The ability of an African American to play baseball in the major and minor leagues during the nineteenth century depended on the support of the local fans and the willingness of teammates to play with him. It also depended on his reception by fans and players of the other teams in the league, who could sometimes be openly hostile. In addition to suffering racial slurs and being the target of pitchers, stories were told of second basemen like Bud Fowler and Frank Grant wearing wooden shin guards to protect them from the spikes of opposing runners sliding into the base.⁴⁰ In 1886, these possibilities were in the backs of the minds of both Fowler and Topeka fans.

In Topeka, where he was a “favorite” of the fans, newspapers referred to Fowler as the “mascot,” but also as a “brunette,” a “dark horse,” and the “colored wonder.” The *Topeka Capital* tried to be more clever describing one of Fowler’s good defensive plays. “Every man on the grounds was heartily in sympathy with the fifteenth amendment when Fowler (colored) made a brilliant running catch from second base into center field, and his colored brethren and admirers shouted until they were black in the face.” Similar terms were used on his first trips to Leavenworth and Lincoln. “Fowler, a colored chap, covered second for the visitors in fine shape.” The *Daily State Democrat* in Lincoln apparently could not be

bothered to learn his name. “That Topeka darkey at second base is a dandy.” Four days later, the paper gave Fowler’s name as Edwards.⁴¹

It was in Lincoln that Fowler received his first serious injury on May 21. Lincoln’s *Nebraska State Journal* provided the details.

Fowler, the colored player with the Topekas, and one of the best in the Western League, had the misfortune to have his right shoulder dislocated yesterday. He made a safe three base hit and attempted to score when [Charlie] Hoover, catcher for the home team, put the ball upon him with vigor sufficient to throw him to the ground very hard. He will not be able to play for some days.⁴²

Fowler had attempted to score after Swift, the second baseman for Lincoln, bobbled the ball when it was returned to the infield.⁴³

A report in Topeka’s *Kansas Democrat*, although not likely based on firsthand knowledge of the “somewhat disastrous” incident, broached the subject of the catcher’s intention, given that the Lincoln newspapers referred to Fowler being “thrown” to the ground.

Fowler, Topeka’s favorite, and the best second baseman in the country, received an injury that will probably lay him up for a few days. ... The action of the Lincoln catcher in rushing upon Fowler, is severely condemned in this city, and it is believed by many, that the object was to do Fowler up at all hazard. We hope that the nine will be able to do the Lincolns up without Fowler, but the fact still remains, that Topeka will be seriously handicapped in to-day’s game.⁴⁴

The *Topeka Commonwealth* expressed hope that the incident was accidental. “There is an impression among the friends of Fowler that he was purposely placed *hors du combat* on the Lincoln diamond. We trust that the impression is groundless.”⁴⁵ Neither Fowler nor the management made comments about the incident published in Topeka newspapers.

Other secondhand reports about Fowler’s condition approached the comical. The *Leavenworth Standard* reported that “Fowler, the phenomenal second” of Topeka was injured in a collision between a runner and a catcher “braced” for the impact. “It is said that [Fowler] cannot play any more this season.” The report in the *Topeka Citizen* was even more dire. “It was reported on the street to-day that Fowler, the colored second baseman of the Topeka ball club, who was injured at Lincoln last week, had died Sunday. No word to such effect has been received by the officers of the club in this city, and the report is not credited.”⁴⁶

Fowler was alive but unable to play. Jack Pettiford and Ren Deagle covered second base while he recuperated.⁴⁷ Upon returning to Topeka with the team on May 25, Fowler was “feeling as well and chipper as ever.” He expressed an interest in playing again, “but Manager Sheard thought best to give him a little longer time to rest.”⁴⁸ His total recovery time following the dislocation of the shoulder of his throwing arm was six days.

Topeka newspapers decided to poke a little fun at the rumors concerning Fowler’s health. On May 27, the *Kansas Democrat* offered, “Fowler, Topeka’s favorite, and second

baseman, will cover his old position this afternoon, and will demonstrate, that he is, at least, a very lively corpse." After recounting the various rumors, the *Topeka Capital* observed, "The present indications, however, point to the fact that Fowler is neither dead nor sleeping."⁴⁹

Fowler was definitely not sleeping. His first game back was a slugfest match with Lincoln at Topeka's Athletic Park that lasted 10 innings. Topeka came to bat in the ninth inning down 13-10 but scored three runs to tie the game. They lost a good opportunity to win the game on an unusual play. With two outs, Topeka's George Haddock slid into third base with such force that "the bag broke as he struck it and was thrown some twenty feet from the diamond." It was the first day for the league umpires to take the field, and Haddock was called out for displacing third base. This time, however, fate would be on Topeka's side for both Haddock and Fowler.⁵⁰

In the top of the tenth inning, Lincoln had two base runners and no outs when the batter shot a long fly ball into the outfield that looked like a double for sure. Instead, center fielder Haddock "made a fine running catch" and threw the ball to Fowler at second in time to double up the runner who had taken off for third base as soon as the ball was hit. Lincoln still managed to score one run before the third out was made, but it could have been much worse. In the bottom of the inning, Fowler was the first to bat, with Topeka down a run. Although his shoulder was still sore, he sent the ball over the center fielder's head and raced around the bases to tie the score. As was the custom, Fowler was rewarded financially by fans in the grandstand, who threw him "a number of quarters and half dollars." What had happened to Fowler in Lincoln just a few days earlier against this same opponent was almost certainly on their minds. The next two batters, Flynn and Fogarty, made outs, but Butler and Pettiford reached base on a pair of singles, and Haddock was hit by a pitch to load the bases. Weaver then sent another ball over the centerfielder's head to clear the bases and win the game for Topeka. It was Weaver's only hit in six times at bat that day.⁵¹

June brought changes to the Topeka BBC. The team had a record of 8-8 in May, and by the end of June, after completing 31 of 32 scheduled games, their record of 16-15 was not the improvement they had hoped for. The headline in the *Topeka Commonwealth* on June 8 was "Tried and Found Wanting."⁵²

The changes started with the release of captain and first baseman Ben Sullivan and relief catcher Billy Miles.⁵³ Some of the remaining players were moved to other positions, at least on occasion. Fowler filled in as catcher, a position he had played in the past, although he was primarily a second baseman after 1884. He wore a mask while catching but no gloves.⁵⁴ Pitchers had initially been limited to delivering the ball underhand, more akin to slow-pitch softball. As they were allowed to raise their release point and pitch the ball at greater speeds during the 1870s and 1880s, gloves became more common for catchers (and first basemen).⁵⁵

Other changes were coming later in June, but in the meantime, the Topeka BBC made its first trip to St. Joseph. Missouri had been a slave state and was involved in the sometimes violent process of determining whether Kansas would allow or ban slavery during the 1850s. Firsthand knowledge of those conflicts was still present in the border communities. The reaction in newspapers to Bud Fowler playing in St. Joseph was mixed. The *St. Joseph News* thought Fowler was "a good ball player but a little mouthy" and claimed

that he offered to bet anyone \$25 that Charley “Silver” King, the star pitcher for St. Joseph, could not strike him out. “The coon is very much stuck on himself.” The *Topeka Commonwealth* responded to the same view expressed in the *St. Joseph Herald* that Fowler was admittedly a good ballplayer but stuck on himself. “This is a good deal of an admission from a Missouri paper, when a colored man is being discussed.”⁵⁶

The *St. Joseph Gazette* saw Fowler as a drawing card and promoted his appearance on the local diamond. “Go out and see Fowler, the greatest second baseman in the west. He is the rival of Dunlap.” The promotion continued the following day. “Fowler, the colored second baseman, is said to be great, and the rest of the players are all exceptionally good.” Fowler was even featured in the small print of an ad for the four-game series.⁵⁷ Fowler was allowed to take the field in Missouri without incident.

As Topeka continued to search for a means of improving their record, William Sheard was replaced as manager by W. Welday Wallace on June 21. Sheard was retained as an officer in the baseball association. Wallace began the season as manager of the club in Denver and was working as one the Western League’s umpires when offered the position with Topeka. He took over the club as its record slipped to 12–15. Topeka also added a new third baseman, Milt Whitehead, and a new second baseman, Tom Shaughnessy. Fowler was moved to center field, flanked by Fogarty in left field and Flynn in right field—the “three F’s.” Along with the personnel changes, the team purchased new uniforms.⁵⁸ The changes seemed to help, as Topeka won the next four games.

Moving Fowler to center field required an explanation, then as now. There were accusations Fowler had recently played below his usual level intentionally to secure his release to play elsewhere. He denied the accusation, stating it was “entirely without foundation.” On the contrary, Fowler’s challenge in professional baseball would be to *avoid* release by a team. Topeka newspapers defended his recent troubles on the field as the result of “several very bad injuries” and his insistence that he still be allowed to play. Consider how quickly he returned following his shoulder injury. Fowler had recently been spiked at St. Joseph and “skinned up” at home against Leavenworth. The *Topeka Capital* defended him. “That he plays as well as he does is remarkable under the circumstances.”⁵⁹

July began with a three-week road trip for Topeka, its longest of the season. The trip started well, with Topeka sweeping the series in Lincoln, which put their record over the last 12 games at 11–1, elevating the team to third place behind Denver and St. Joseph. Then the Topeka BBC made its first trip to Colorado and was swept in eight games by Denver and Leadville, dropping them below .500 and into fourth place. In Colorado, Fowler was even

BASE BALL
THE LAST GAMES OF THE
FIRST SERIES
Will be played at the
RIVERSIDE PARK!
WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY,
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY
JUNE 9th, 11th, 12th and 13th
Topeka, with their great colored Fowler, will play the St. Joseph Reds four games on the dates above mentioned. Do not fail to witness them, as they will be the greatest contests of the season.
ADMISSION, 25 CENTS.

called on to pitch in relief. He was already known in Denver from his time with the Pueblo Pastimes in the Colorado State League in late 1885. The *Rocky Mountain News* encouraged fans to come to the ballpark to “see the great and only Fowler this afternoon. He is a dandy.”⁶⁰

During the trip, additional players joined Topeka’s roster. An article in the *Sporting News* submitted by “Charlie” listed three outfielders (Flynn, Fogarty, and Fowler), four infielders (Butler, Deagle, Shaughnessy, and Whitehead), four catchers (Bradley, Kenyon, Smith, and Weaver), and four pitchers (Bauer, Burchard, McElroy, and Pettiford).⁶¹ At the time, a roster of 15 players was larger than clubs like Topeka would usually carry because the cost in salaries would strain their tight budgets. Teams typically carried two pitchers who could alternate days to give their arms time to recover, with a position player occasionally filling in, as Fowler did. There were often two catchers, perhaps working with specific pitchers. As with pitchers, another position player might be asked to catch occasionally, something Fowler also did for Topeka. Four pitchers and four catchers on the Topeka BBC was excessive. In addition, the extra pitchers and catchers were often expected to play in the field on their off days, yet Topeka had players for each of those positions, too. A large roster that produced poor results on the field created tensions that would soon come to a head.

However, the trip west was not without its lighter moments. One such “laughable incident” on the train ride involved Fowler, as related by the *Topeka Capital*.

A tree had been blown down so close to the railroad track that the branches knocked out all the windows in the car, as the train passed. The crashing of the glass so frightened Fowler that he jumped through a window, glass and all, on the opposite side of the car, while the train was still in motion. Another passenger followed his example and was nearly killed, while Fowler escaped with only a few bruises.⁶²

After returning from Colorado, the Topeka BBC was at home for series with St. Joseph and Leadville, two clubs ahead of them in the standings. Topeka defeated St. Joseph in the first game, with Fowler back at second base. He missed the next game because of a “sore foot,” though the cause of the problem was not mentioned. Topeka lost. “The home team played by no means an inferior game, though the strength of the nine was weakened by the absence of Fowler.” The third game ended in a tie and was later replayed. However, Fowler endeared himself to the local fans with a display of guile. A St. Joseph player stole second base, though Topeka argued he was clearly thrown out. Unlike Leadville, they carefully argued their point, keeping the runner on second. When Fowler returned to second base, he took the ball with him. The pitcher and catcher assumed their positions as if ready to begin, and when the runner stepped off second base, despite admonitions from his teammates to be wary, Fowler tagged him out. Once again, Fowler was kept busy picking up coins thrown from the grandstand.⁶³ Variations of the hidden-ball trick have been used since at least 1859, and it has been reviled or applauded ever since.⁶⁴

It was during the St. Joseph series, as losses continued to outpace wins, that the problems on the Topeka BBC reached the point that local newspapers called for changes. Part of the problem was that key players, including Fowler and shortstop David Butler were “on the

sick list," but they would "play for all they are worth." Yet it was not simply a matter of injuries. There were also allegations that some players drank alcohol to excess. In addition, there was tension between Wallace and some of the players, who were being assigned to positions in a way that bewildered nearly everyone. The break came on July 26, following the replay of the game that had ended in a 6-6 tie. St. Joseph won the rematch, 8-7. As shown in the box score, Topeka players were shuffled in a manner that suggested a fundamental lack of understanding of how to manage them. The first two innings were chaotic. After the third inning, when Pettiford was moved to pitcher and Fowler was moved to catcher for the remainder of the game, St. Joseph managed only two singles and no runs, but the damage had been done. As noted two days earlier, "the whole club was generally demoralized."⁶⁵

TOPEKA.								
	A.B.	R.	1B.	T.B.	P.O.	A.	E.	
Whitehead, 3b.....	5	1	0	0	1	5	0	
Fowler, c. 2b and p.4	2	2	2	2	3	1	0	
Flynn, 2b. lf. & cf..3	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	
Fogarty, lf.....4	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	
Butler, ss.....4	2	1	2	4	1	0		
Bradley, 2b. p. & c.3	0	0	0	8	0	2		
Deagle, 1b.....4	0	0	0	11	0	1		
Smith, cf. & c.....4	0	0	0	0	0	2		
Pettiford, p of & 2b4	0	1	1	0	4	0		
Totals.....	35	7	6	7	24	12	7	
The score by innings was as follows:								
BY INNINGS.								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Topekas.....	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
St. Josephs.....	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0

On July 27, Wallace resigned as manager and was replaced by H.P Dillon and Henry Strong of the baseball association. In addition, five players were cut from the roster. Bradley, Burchard, McElroy, and Shaughnessy were released. Weaver had left earlier in the month to play for the independent team in Abilene, but he would return to play for Topeka on August 20. For the time being, the Topeka BBC would carry (and pay) only 10 players.⁶⁶

Jack Pettiford was the primary pitcher, who alternated with Al Bauer. Jack Kenyon was the primary catcher, alternating with Harry Smith. Fowler was sometimes used in relief at both positions. Pettiford and Kenyon were especially popular with the fans, the newspapers, and the baseball association. This was on display at a game on August 2. "Kenyon was addressed on the field yesterday by President Dillon, who made him a neat little speech and raised his salary \$25." The infield usually consisted of Ren Deagle, Bud Fowler, David Butler, and Milt Whitehead arranged from first base to third base, respectively. James Flynn, Jack Fogarty, and the extra pitchers and catchers typically patrolled the outfield.⁶⁷ However, a few more changes came in August.

At the beginning of the month, Topeka signed Henry Moore to play center field. He had been playing for Atlanta in the Southern Association but was blacklisted by his former team. Topeka made an unspecified payment to allow his reinstatement in good standing. On August 11, Topeka signed outfielder Leech Maskrey, who had played for Topeka's Western BBC in 1880. Fogarty suffered an injury to his hand, so help in the outfield was needed. There were also additional releases—catcher Harry Smith on August 9, and third baseman Milt Whitehead and the argumentative pitcher Al Bauer on August 20. In turn, Flynn moved to third base, Weaver returned from Abilene, and Charley Blanchard from nearby St Marys, Kansas was signed as a pitcher.⁶⁸

As all of these personnel changes were occurring, there was an unusual turn of events. After Wallace resigned as Topeka's manager, he was rehired by the league as an umpire. His first assignment on July 28 was to umpire games in Topeka with the visiting club from

Leadville. There was concern he would favor the visitors given the complaints about his poor management of the Topeka BBC and his resignation only two days earlier. In its account of the first game, won by Topeka, 10–9, the *Topeka Commonwealth* assessed Wallace's performance. "We are of the opinion that, as a whole, the umpiring was well performed. There is no better umpire than Wallace." However, Bauer, who pitched for Topeka that day, still harbored ill feelings toward Wallace, and his arguments during the game included "rough language," which earned him a fine from the umpire.⁶⁹ Theodore McEwing umpired the remaining games of the series.

Topeka lost the second game to Leadville, 3–1. Fowler came in to pitch in relief of Pettiford, who became too ill to continue. During the third game, Topeka again defeated Leadville by a close score of 2–1. Topeka scored both of its runs in the third inning. Fowler extended that inning through creative batsmanship. Down in the count with two strikes, the next pitch was well off the plate, so Fowler intentionally swung and missed. The catcher also missed the ball, allowing Fowler to reach first base safely, as Kenyon scored from third base for Topeka's second run. Fowler stole second base, ready to score, but he was stranded when Flynn struck out to end the inning.⁷⁰

As Topeka entered August with a record of 23–28 (.451), they had 25 games remaining, 16 of which were against Denver and St. Joseph, the league's top two clubs. Fowler would suffer another injury in a game with St. Joseph. The most dangerous place for an African American ballplayer during a game in the minor leagues was when he batted. It was not unusual for batters to be hit by pitches, which made this an easy opportunity to hurt a player and claim it was an accident. Whether the pitch that hit Fowler during the second inning in St. Joseph on August 6 was intentional or accidental is unknown, but it struck him in the mouth. He remained in the game but sat out the following day before returning to the lineup on August 8. St. Joseph newspapers did not mention the incident, but Topeka newspapers did, without comment. In addition to the physical ailments he was enduring, his wife, who was staying in Kansas City, was suffering from an unspecified illness. After a game in Topeka on August 12, Fowler left for Kansas City to visit his wife, but he returned to Topeka in time for the game with league-leading Denver the next afternoon.⁷¹

By the end of August, Topeka's record had fallen to 30–38 (.441). The club started well, splitting both of the four-game series with St. Joseph and Denver. The two games they lost to Denver were close (8–6 and 4–1). Then the team crumbled. They lost three of four to St. Joseph while playing in Topeka, and they lost three of four to fifth-place Leavenworth on the road. After an easy 11–4 victory in the first game at home against St. Joseph, the differences in scores had been no more than three runs in any of the last seven games that month.⁷² Perhaps the losses in close games stoked the frustration of fans that led to charges of treachery committed by their own players.

The *Topeka Commonwealth* had always been quick to vent and cast blame, and it did so again on August 24, after a 5–3 loss to St. Joseph. "[One] thing is certain. the work of three of the Topeka players was very 'fishy' indeed and subsequent events make matters appear worse." On August 31, the *Topeka Capital* reported similar talk on the street. "Flynn and Butler are said to have played an accountably poor game at Leavenworth." However, the

Capital was not so quick to judge. “There are those who connect such a situation with venal intentions. Whatever the appearances may be, a player should not be accused of crooked work until there is proof of it and then he should be summarily dealt with.”⁷³

Not every player performed poorly. For example, Fowler continued to hit for extra bases. On August 20, the *Topeka Commonwealth* reported, “Fowler, it will be seen, got in his regular triple yesterday.” However, he missed the train to Leavenworth and consequently did not play in the first game of that series, lost by Topeka, 7–6. Captain Fogarty was not playing due to injury during this period (when he umpired in place of McEwing).⁷⁴ Pettiford and Kenyon were being overworked, sometimes serving as Topeka’s battery on consecutive days. Of the 16 games over 25 days in August, Pettiford was the starting pitcher in 10, achieving a record of 4–6. He pitched three of the four games in the each of the series with Denver and Leavenworth. Bauer (released during that stretch) and the local amateur Blanchard split the other six games, going a collective 2–4. There are likely additional factors, other than treachery, that might have played a role in the losses. The *Leavenworth Standard* taunted the Topeka newspapers about their complaints with unstated racial overtones. “The Topeka papers are kicking about last Sunday’s game. To tell the truth the only gentleman in the club is Fowler, the second baseman.”⁷⁵

Topeka had 12 games remaining on its schedule in September. The first series was at home versus Leavenworth. Topeka lost the first game, 20–7, in a “lifeless,” error-filled performance. The *Topeka Commonwealth* suggested, “A few fines judiciously distributed among the Topeka players, might have a salutary effect.” However, Topeka rebounded to win the next three games to close out the season at Athletic Park. The team then departed for Colorado to play four games each in Denver and Leadville. Topeka won two of four from Denver, who nevertheless clinched the pennant. They were not so fortunate in Leadville, where Topeka lost all four games. Topeka shortstop David Butler refused to travel with the team to Leadville, opting to play for Denver instead. That earned him a suspension on September 16 and a prohibition from playing for Denver. Topeka released him on September 22, after the season had concluded for both clubs. Before returning to Kansas, Topeka and Denver played a series of exhibition games, with Butler at shortstop for Topeka. The team returned to Topeka on September 27, minus Butler and Flynn, who remained in Denver.⁷⁶ Topeka newspapers reported the Topeka BBC finished in fourth place, with a record of 34–46 (.425), but it was actually one better at 35–45 (.438).⁷⁷

Unfortunately, the final home series with Leavenworth had marked the end of Bud Fowler’s time with the Topeka BBC. Exactly what happened and even when it happened are unclear. On September 2, the *Kansas Democrat* reported, “Fowler broke a nerve in his eye just after he made a rank error.” He committed two errors in that first game with Leavenworth on September 1. Yet, Fowler was in the lineup on September 2, an 11-inning contest won by Topeka, 11–8. Fowler had a single and two runs scored, with four put outs, four assists, and one error. The *Topeka Commonwealth* reported after the game, “Fowler is disabled and cannot play today [September 3].” Pettiford and Maskrey covered second base the final two games of the series.⁷⁸ On September 7, the *Kansas State Journal* reported, “Fowler, Topeka’s great second baseman, will not make the western trip, on account of his eyesight, caused by being

hit in the eye with a ball at St. Joe” (instead of Leavenworth). On September 9, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported, “Fowler, the dark-skinned but active second baseman, was left behind with a bad eye, the result of a missed hot liner.”⁷⁹

Thus, it would seem Fowler was hit in the eye when he misplayed a sharply hit ball either in St. Joseph or at home against Leavenworth, and his sight became progressively worse. Consequently, he would remain in Topeka while the team traveled to Colorado. However, subsequent events cast doubt on the full truth of this story.

In addition to the minor league team in 1886, Topeka had an “amateur” club that played intercity matches through the summer in pursuit of a mythical state championship. No formal structure to support such a claim was in place. It would also be more accurate to describe the Athletic BBC as a semipro team. They took trips through regions of the state that lasted several days, playing for guaranteed fees or percentages of the gate receipts. The club was initially organized around several “dissatisfied” players from the Santa Fe Reds (Red Stockings). The team was named for the railroad shops where its players worked. Occasionally referred to as the Topeka Reds in 1886, the team periodically organized and reorganized, sometimes under the name Hackneys. They had even been invited to play preseason exhibition games against the minor league club. After their split from the Reds, the Athletics were organized around a nucleus of players, with the remainder of the roster filled by numerous other players at home and on the long road trips. Among them were members of the minor league club, as well as James Hightower and a man named Jones, whose first name was not given. Both were African American.⁸⁰ Thus, Topeka’s minor league club and top independent team were both integrated in 1886.

The Topeka Browns of 1885 did not reorganize in 1886. In its place came a team named the Western Clippers BBC, whose roster was published in Topeka newspapers in June. The Clippers scheduled their first practice game at Garfield Park on June 24, but they apparently played only one game against another team—the Topeka Reds. On July 3, the Clippers led the Reds, 15–13, in the eighth inning, when, for some unstated reason, the Clippers refused to continue. The umpire awarded the game to the Reds by forfeit.⁸¹ Apparently, opportunities for African Americans to play on organized teams in Topeka were limited in 1886, other than the two integrated teams.

James Hightower had played for the Topeka Browns in 1885 and became a frequent shortstop for the Athletics in games from June through October 1886. Jones played only occasionally in the outfield with the Athletics, and another Black ballplayer in the region by the name of George William Castone took the field for the Athletics a time or two. Players released by the minor league club, such as Tom Shaughnessy, also played for the Athletics. So did Bud Fowler.⁸²

Only two days after Fowler was left behind by the minor league club on September 7 because of the injury to his eye, Fowler and Hightower took the field for the team from Twin Mounds, a rural area southeast of Topeka and southwest of Lawrence. Their opponent was the white Lawrence town team. On September 12, Fowler pitched for the Athletics in a 6–1 victory over the Atchison Pomeroy’s, the city’s white town team. Also playing in that game for the Athletics were Hightower at shortstop and Shaughnessy at second base. On

September 14, Hightower, Shaughnessy, and the Athletics defeated the Lawrence Eagles, an African American team, 10–9. Former Topeka minor leaguer Roxy Burchard umpired the 12-inning game. The Eagles’ roster that day featured Fowler at second base, as well as pitcher George William Castone and catcher Frank Maupin from Kansas City. The following day, Fowler and Maupin formed the battery for the Eagles (Castone played right field), as they defeated the Athletics, 5–4. The stories of Castone and Maupin have been covered in earlier monographs.⁸³ All in all, Fowler was quite busy on the baseball diamond for a player who was losing the sight in one eye only a week earlier.

This raises the question as to why Fowler did not make the trip to Colorado. The actual reason is probably unknowable, but what is known suggests a possible explanation, though it is only conjecture.

Fowler’s presence on the team had resulted in no apparent racial tensions with the other members of the club, so leaving him in Topeka the last two weeks of the season after playing five months with the team for this reason seems unlikely. The managers had trouble keeping Fowler off the field following his injuries, even when his shoulder was dislocated and he was hit in the mouth by a pitch. He had essentially played the entire season with a single minor league club, one of only two times he did so in his career. (The other was with Greenville, Michigan in 1889.) In addition to his respectable fielding record mentioned earlier, Fowler finished with a batting average of .309, tops among all Topeka players and eleventh overall. Fogarty (.275) and Flynn (.263) were the next highest Topeka players with over 200 at bats.⁸⁴

Perhaps Fowler wished to stay behind, and the eye injury could be offered as a plausible reason. There were only eight more games that had no meaning for the Topeka BBC or the final standings. Instead, he could play baseball with other Black players around Topeka and Lawrence, about 25 miles to the east. Fowler was noted as a promoter for African American teams and leagues during his career.⁸⁵ He had not yet given up on playing for minor league clubs, but opportunities for other Black ballplayers to take the field with a competitive team were important to him. At the end of September, just such a proposal was reported in the *Lawrence Evening Journal* and picked up by newspapers in Topeka and Kansas City.⁸⁶

Lawrence probably will have next year two professional base ball teams. The association here will organize a first class team and join the western league, and the colored men will organize a nine composed of the best colored players, and travel extensively through the States, playing exhibition games. This will be the only professional colored base ball nine in the west. It will consist of such players as Hightower and Fowler of Topeka, Maupin of Kansas City, one man from St. Louis and several professionals from different parts of the country. Only three or four Lawrence men will be played. This nine could play ball almost without error. They could compete with the league nines, and could probably make money for the managers. The colored men have proved their ability to beat the best Amateur nines in Kansas, and could organize a nine that would be “worthy of the steel” of any organization in the country.⁸⁷

It is unknown how the idea for this team originated or who the driving force was behind the idea, but it sounds like Bud Fowler. However, organization of the team never progressed, and in November, Fowler signed with the minor league club in Binghamton, New York, where racial tensions would be high on the integrated teams and in the league.⁸⁸

Topeka would continue to host Black baseball clubs, led for several years in the early twentieth century by talented player, manager, and promoter John “Topeka Jack” Johnson. Local players Elwood “Bingo” DeMoss, Dudley “Tullie” McAdoo, and Carroll “Dink” Mothell would enjoy careers in the Negro Leagues.⁸⁹ Yet none would be allowed the opportunity to accomplish what Bud Fowler did with Topeka’s first minor league club in 1886.

Goldsby’s Golden Giants, 1887

Two months after the close of the 1886 season, the Western League reorganized in early November. There was still some uncertainty as to which eight cities would be represented in the league, but decisions were reached on matters such as a salary cap of \$150 per month for each player. Salaries for umpires were later set at \$125 per month, and the league would pay their train fares.⁹⁰

Of the six clubs in the Western League in 1886—Denver, Leadville, Leavenworth, Lincoln, St. Joseph, and Topeka—Leadville was dropped for 1887. The league planned to expand to eight clubs, and there were six possible contenders for the three open spots—Hastings and Omaha, Nebraska; Pueblo, Colorado; Kansas City, Missouri; Des Moines, Iowa; and Wichita, Kansas. Omaha was admitted to the league, followed by Hastings. Kansas City was also admitted in early January but had not abandoned hope of returning to the National League. Then, in early March, Indianapolis was chosen to purchase the St. Louis Maroons and join the National League. Kansas City grudgingly became the final member of the Western League, though local baseball boosters still had to settle who would run the team.⁹¹ In April, it was also reported that the average salaries for Kansas City’s players were \$1,450–1,500 for the season, well above the Western League limit. After the season began, Lincoln and Topeka would likewise be accused of exceeding the salary limit, but no evidence of this was presented.⁹²

Plans for the 1887 Topeka BBC began before the 1886 season ended. In late August, a move was begun to organize a well-funded stock company to support the team. By early October, the Topeka Base Ball Association was fully reorganized. Arrangements for grounds and a new manager were still incomplete, but preparations for 1887 were well ahead of the effort made during the previous spring.⁹³

This effort was driven, in large part, by a real estate boom in Topeka (and elsewhere in the West). Land was purchased and sold at a profit. It was an unsustainable bubble that peaked in 1886 and 1887, but it fueled optimism that led to Topeka’s entry into minor league baseball.⁹⁴ In March 1887, the *Kansas State Journal* connected the economic boom and baseball.

The great boom that has struck this western country will only assist in making the base ball business profitable. Money is being made in real estate and business, and while men make money they will spend freely, and there is no sport as much enjoyed as the national game.⁹⁵

Baseball was also seen as a means to boost a town's reputation, especially a town entranced by an economic boom. Politics entered the mix when the *Kansas Democrat* chastised the Republican candidate for mayor, Judge D.C. Metsker, because he did not appreciate the value of the baseball team and refused to make a contribution to support it.

"I am for everything that will boom Topeka," said Judge Metsker in the republican convention, and then, when asked by the base ball committee to help Topeka out, he whines that he does not attend base ball games. We will not lay this up against Metsker on account of his stinginess[;] we will be charitable and say he is ignorant of what the great base ball nine Topeka now possesses will do for this city. ... Our city has come in for a wonderful amount of free advertising [through newspaper stories].⁹⁶

For Topeka, the task of hiring someone to run the team was soon completed. Walton Goldsby was signed at the beginning of November to "control the affairs of the local club." He had served in the same capacity with Nashville, Tennessee in the Southern Association (Southern League) in 1886. The *Topeka Commonwealth* incorrectly reported that Nashville had won the pennant. They actually finished in third place with a record of 46–43. Two of the eight teams in the league folded in July, and the season ended early on September 4. The league suffered from several problems summarized by the *Sporting News*. "The whole Southern League is a disgrace to base ball. Games are bought and sold, umpires ditto, and players conduct themselves everywhere like the veriest of rowdies. ... There is little honesty in the Southern League." The Southern Association's troubles were capped by a devastating earthquake (estimated magnitude of 6.6–6.9) on August 31 in Charleston, South Carolina, one of the league cities. The team was playing in Tennessee at the time.⁹⁷

In addition to taking a break from baseball turmoil in the South, Goldsby would start drawing a salary with Topeka on January 1, earlier than the players. However, the process of signing those players was underway well before the beginning of the new year (Table 4).⁹⁸ It was not a collection of town-team amateurs. Nine already had major league experience, and nearly all would later play in the major leagues. Jack Kenyon, a fan favorite in Topeka from the 1886 club, was the exception.

Goldsby knew four of the players because they had played in the Southern Association in 1886—Jim Conway and Joe Gunson (Atlanta), Dan Stearns (Macon), and Tom Sullivan (Charleston). Two others were known to Topeka fans because they had played for Lincoln—Charlie Hoover (who was involved in the collision with Bud Fowler) and Perry Werden. Jimmy Macullar, the senior member of the team at 32 years of age, had spent the previous five seasons in the major leagues with Cincinnati (1882–1883) and Baltimore (1884–1886). The team had several lefthanded batters, but what was unusual by today's standards is that Macullar at shortstop and Spud (Rocky) Johnson at third base also threw lefthanded.

As in 1886, the team assembled by Goldsby initially had no nickname. It was simply the Topeka BBC. The first mention of the name Goldsby's Golden Giants was published in the *Sporting News* on March 5 in a column titled "Western Hits," a collection of baseball notices about western clubs. One notice reported the status of a pitcher claimed by multiple clubs.

Table 4.—Players on the roster of Goldsby’s Golden Giants of Topeka during Western League baseball games in 1887 with their principal positions. Nearly all the players had played or would play for major league teams. Players marked (●) were portrayed on the Downing cabinet card produced in April.

Player	Position	Major Leagues
Joe “Old Hoss” Ardner ●	2B	1884, 1890
? Baker	LF	
Jim Conway ●	P	1884–1885, 1889
Harry Dooms	P	1892
Walt Goldsby ●	LF	1884, 1886, 1888
Joe Gunson ●	C	1884, 1889, 1892–1893
Frank Hafner ●	P	1888
James “Bug” Holliday	CF	1889–1898
Charlie Hoover ●	C	1888–1889
James “Spud” Johnson ●	3B	1889–1891
Jacob “Jack” Kenyon ●	C	
Jimmy Macullar ●	SS	1879, 1882–1886
John Sneed	OF	1884, 1890–1891
Dan Stearns ●	OF/1B	1880–1885, 1889
Tom Sullivan ●	P	1884, 1886, 1888–1889
Perry Werden ●	OF/1B	1884, 1888, 1890–1893, 1897

Frank Haffner [sic] has at last signed with the Topeka’s. He will make his mark if he pitches in the same form as last season, and will help Goldsby’s Golden Giants win the pennant of the Western League for the season of 1887.⁹⁹

Two days later, the *Kansas State Journal* in Topeka picked up the name and began using it regularly. “Goldsby’s Golden Giants[,] or the three G’s, is what the St. Louis *Sporting News* calls the Topeka team.” Other newspapers in Topeka and *Sporting Life* did not begin using the name until early April. Why the term “Golden” was included was not mentioned, although *Sporting Life* erroneously stated it was because several players had red hair.¹⁰⁰

In April, the players were photographed “for an advertising scheme.” In addition to cabinet cards produced by local photographer George Downing, a group photograph of the players would be used on boxes of cigars sold under the brand name “Topeka League Club.” It would have been a rather bland name for marketing cigars or a baseball club.¹⁰¹

Tuchman Bros., of Kansas City, to-day expressed to the Topeka base ball club twelve boxes of a new brand of cigars, labeled “Goldsby’s Golden Giants,” and bearing on the inside of the lid a group picture of the Topeka base ball club. The cigar is excellently flavored and will be sold in Kansas, Missouri and Colorado. This is quite a notable recognition for a base ball team that is not yet quite three weeks old.¹⁰²

Pitcher Tom Sullivan even sent his friends back home in Cincinnati “a lot of Topeka smokers in a box decorated with the photographs of the Topeka nine and labeled ‘G.G.G.’”¹⁰³

In addition to the roster, the task of getting a ballpark ready also progressed. In the autumn of 1886, the Topeka Base Ball Association had been notified they would not be able to use Athletic Park again in 1887. It was part of an 87-acre parcel of land that had been sold in September. A search began for a new field, but arrangements were made on December 1 to lease the existing ballpark again from one of the new owners, Cyrus K. Holliday. He was one of the founders of the city of Topeka and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad. Holliday’s interest in baseball was strictly business, and he raised the lease from \$50 in 1886 to \$1,000 in 1887. This placed a financial burden on the baseball association, which led to a discussion of abandoning minor league baseball, but interest in the club was too strong to permit such a decision. In early 1887, the sale of the land was contested in a lawsuit referred to as the Ball Park Case filed by the former owner in Nebraska. The lawsuit was not settled until the summer of 1888, so the judicial proceedings did not interfere with use of the ballpark during the 1887 season (Holliday and his partner lost the court case).¹⁰⁴

A plan to expand the seating capacity of the grandstand by adding two sections was announced at the beginning of March. Just as work was ready to get underway, a fire of undetermined origin destroyed the amphitheatre. There were rumors of arson, but no evidence of how the fire started was reported. Two fire companies responded to the alarm, which came after dark on March 9. However, the “heaviness of the [unpaved] streets” slowed the wagons. When they arrived, the pine structure was engulfed in flames. Compounding their problems, the ballpark was located on the margin of the city, and there was no hydrant close enough to use. However, the fire had progressed to the point that the absence of a hydrant did not matter. There was little the firefighters could do but remove sections of the wooden fence and protect nearby homes. Fortunately, the grandstand was insured for \$1,000, which was expected to cover most of the cost of replacing it.¹⁰⁵

Within a day or two, a fence was erected where the grandstand once stood to prevent livestock from wandering onto the field. By the end of March, the new grandstand was completed. It formed a crescent behind home plate estimated to seat 800 spectators. The west side was reserved for female fans, who would be shielded from the sun by an awning. Additional “bleaching boards” were “placed north of the grand stand, over toward the right field.” The bleachers would be extended in May. The Topeka correspondent for the *Sporting Life*, “Irish Pat,” stated that the bleachers were on the east side of the grandstand and only the catcher would face into the sun during most games, which were played in the evening, beginning at 4:00 or 4:30. These descriptions suggest the grandstand faced northwest, with its entrance on land now north of the intersection of Lane Street and Willow Avenue.¹⁰⁶

In addition to signing players, Goldsby hired a groundskeeper. Arthur W. Saunders was a ballplayer and umpire from Evansville, Indiana. His obituary credited him with being the first pitcher to throw a curve ball in Evansville during the late 1870s. He also played in the outfield and caught during his playing career, which included stints with town teams and minor league clubs in cities such as Selma, Alabama and Nashville, Tennessee. It was Goldsby who hired Saunders to pitch for Nashville in August 1886.¹⁰⁷

Why Goldsby hired Saunders as a groundskeeper was not reported. Teams in major cities were beginning to value good groundskeepers,¹⁰⁸ but hiring someone from another state was unusual in Kansas at the time. Saunders arrived on March 23, two weeks after the grandstand had burned, when arson was still rumored. Protecting the wooden structure would be part of his job. He was also an avid hunter, but the *Kansas State Journal* reported that Saunders “brought with him a shot gun, a rifle and a revolver, in order to be prepared for any person or persons who wish to put the grand stand out of existence.”¹⁰⁹

Preparing the playing field would take work. Athletic Park had been used to hold cattle during the winter, “and the field is found to be very uneven and full of cow tracks.” Perry Werden twisted his knee during practice after stepping in one of the holes while chasing a fly ball. Plans were made to have the field harrowed and rolled. On the scheduled opening day in April, the *Topeka Commonwealth* praised Saunders efforts. “The park was never in such condition before. Park-keeper Saunders understands his business.”¹¹⁰

In addition to maintaining the ballpark, Saunders was able to fill other roles. He practiced with the team and played during exhibition games. He could also serve as a substitute pitcher or outfielder, if necessary. During preseason games, he served as umpire, and he filled this role in a game with Wichita late in the season. Saunders also umpired benefit games played while the Golden Giants were out of town. One such game pitted the Fats against the Leans among the real estate men enjoying the land boom. They raised \$50 for Ingleside, a home for “workingwomen and children” (orphans). It had been established in January 1882 by the Women’s Christian Association and chartered in 1886. For the game, Saunders dressed to impress. He wore “two navy revolvers and a sword, which was a strong intimation to the ‘timid’ real estate men that his decisions were not to be disputed.” To protect himself from errant baseballs in a game played by amateurs, Saunders “used a bird cage for a face protector.” He remained in Topeka through the end of September, when he returned to Evansville.¹¹¹

The players had arrived, a team nickname had been established, and the ballpark was in good hands. All that remained was new uniforms. The suits chosen for Goldsby’s Golden Giants featured no gold. They were dark blue, with a white cord on the side of the pants and a white belt. The stockings were also blue, but the cap was white, with a blue button. White letters for the word “TOPEKA” were mistakenly omitted from the breast of the jersey and were added later to advertise the city when the team played elsewhere. However, when the team first practiced in the new uniforms, Jack Kenyon, the only player returning from the 1886 club, chose to wear his old suit, “probably for fond memory’s sake.”¹¹²

Baseball would have some new rules for 1887, which were approved by the National League and followed by the Western League. Previously, the hitter was allowed to call for the pitch to be high or low, relative to his waist. Now the strike zone would be any pitch crossing the plate between the hitter’s shoulders and knees. Other changes would directly affect statistics for both hitters and pitchers. The previous counts of six balls for a walk and three strikes for a strikeout were changed to five balls and four strikes. Umpires would be given a device for keeping track of the count. Not only would it be easier for a batter to walk (and to avoid striking out), but each walk would be credited the same as a hit in calculating

batting average. The general opinion of the Topeka players was that “the new rules favor the batter a great deal, and that heavy hitting and big scores would be the rule under them. In that case, Topeka has no complaint to make—the Giants will get none of the worst of it.”¹¹³

As April began, the players all arrived in Topeka. The roster of 12 players included three pitchers, three catchers, and six fielders (Table 4). Groundskeeper Art Saunders was also listed as a “change pitcher,” available if the need arose. In addition to playing left field, Goldsby would begin the season as manager and the on-field captain.¹¹⁴ As the team prepared for preseason games, “Hale Ritchie, the veteran amateur,” who had played for the Western BBC during the 1870s through 1881, joined them, fielding fly balls “like a professional.”¹¹⁵

The first exhibition game on April 2 was against a team composed of players from Washburn College bolstered by the Golden Giants’ battery of Tom Sullivan and Jack Kenyon.¹¹⁶ The first contests against other professional clubs began on April 5. The Des Moines club in the Northwestern League stopped in Topeka for three games. Somewhat surprisingly, Topeka easily won the first two games, 13–6 and 10–3, which “awakened a great deal of enthusiasm.” Des Moines won the third game, 14–11. Art Saunders served as umpire during the series.¹¹⁷

The Golden Giants then traveled to St. Louis to play the major league Browns of the American Association on April 10 and 11. The Browns were a good team that won the league championship from 1885 through 1888. Yet, once again, the Golden Giants surprised their opponent, winning game one, 12–9. In the opinion of the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, “The visitors are a good ball team, and ought to easily win the pennant in the Western League.” The writer went on to note the major league experiences of several of the Golden Giants. Embarrassed, the Browns won the second game, 16–7.¹¹⁸ That was the end of the preseason contests for the Golden Giants, who were scheduled to open the season by hosting St. Joseph in a three-game series beginning on Thursday, April 21. Sunday games were not on the schedule in Topeka, where the baseball association chose to avoid “Sabbath-breaking,” or in Leavenworth, where Sunday baseball was illegal.¹¹⁹

Rain forced the postponement of the season’s first two games in Topeka, but they were able to make up one of the games on an off day after the end of the series. The Golden Giants easily defeated St. Joseph in both games. Leavenworth was the next opponent to visit, and the Golden Giants won two of the three games to close their opening homestand in first place. They next traveled to Kansas City, Leavenworth, and St. Joseph. Topeka won two of three in Kansas City, but Goldsby sprained his ankle while sliding into second base in the second game. A player named Baker (no first name given) took Goldsby’s place in left field in game three. He was a local semipro player who was given a one-game tryout.¹²⁰

In the series at Leavenworth, the Golden Giants lost the first game but came back to win the next two. The teams were evenly matched, and the scores in all three games were close, the third game going 12 innings. In the second game on May 7, James “Bug” Holliday joined the Golden Giants as an outfielder, after Baker and others had filled in for the injured Goldsby. In his first game with Topeka, he was identified as “Hall” because he had played under the name Jimmie Hall in St. Joseph in 1886. After that, he was listed as Holliday (or Halladay or similar misspelling). Goldsby returned to the lineup on May 14,

but Holliday remained with the team, becoming the regular center fielder. Illnesses also afflicted the Golden Giants that month. Charlie Hoover fell ill and returned to Topeka to recover. Shortstop Jimmy Macullar missed games due to a bout of pneumonia. Despite the injuries and illnesses, Topeka traveled to St. Joseph and swept the three-game series. The wins continued at home through the end of the month and included a 12-game winning streak. Goldsby's Golden Giants compiled a record of 24–5 (.828) after playing at least one series with all seven clubs, winning all 10 series. The opening remark about the Western League in the *Sporting News* each week became some variation of “The Topekas still lead.” Leavenworth strengthened its hold on second place, while other clubs made roster changes and jockeyed for third place.¹²¹

The Golden Giants left Topeka on June 1 for a nearly three-week road trip. It did not begin well, as Denver swept the opening three-game series. Topeka then traveled through Hastings, Omaha, and Lincoln, where they managed to win five of eight games. One game was postponed due to rain in Omaha. Despite the 5–6 record on the trip, the Golden Giants remained solidly in first place.¹²²

During the road trip, outfielder John “Jack” Sneed was signed by Topeka. His release was purchased for \$300 from Memphis, Tennessee of the Southern League, where he served as manager, captain, and player. He left Memphis under a cloud of accusations about his behavior but was exonerated of any wrongdoing by the Southern League. His side of the story was presented on the front page of the *Sporting News* after he visited St. Louis on his way to join the Golden Giants in Omaha. To make room for Sneed on the roster, Topeka released Charlie Hoover at his own request. The addition of Sneed was timely, because Goldsby was bedridden in Omaha with a fever and did not play the remainder of the month.¹²³

It was during this June road trip that errors in box scores caused confusion as to who played for Topeka. Box scores for June 7 in the *Sporting News* and *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* had Andrews at second base and Harris in left field, but box scores in the *Topeka Commonwealth* and *Sporting Life* listed Ardner, the club's regular second baseman, and Goldsby in left field, his usual position.¹²⁴ No one named Andrews or Harris played for the Golden Giants.

In a game on June 14, *Sporting Life* listed “Lund” as the right fielder for Topeka while the team played in Omaha after Goldsby became ill. The other outfielders were Holliday and Werden. Baseball-Reference.com tentatively listed this player as “Will Lund?” from Port Huron (Fort Gratiot), Michigan. However, it seems unlikely he would travel from Michigan to play a single game for the Golden Giants in his first year of professional baseball. Lund's baseball career during the late 1880s and early 1890s was primarily with minor league and town teams in his home state, along with a short stint on a minor league club in Toledo in early 1888.¹²⁵ Similarly, for a game on June 15 in Lincoln, with Goldsby still on the sick list, *Sporting Life* listed “Sand” in left field for Topeka. Once again, the other outfielders were Holliday and Werden.¹²⁶ In both cases, box scores in the *Topeka Commonwealth*, *Omaha Bee*, and *Lincoln Evening Call* listed the outfielders as Holliday, Werden, and Sneed.¹²⁷ Apparently, Lund and Sand were mistakenly inserted for Sneed, Topeka's new outfielder, who was listed correctly in subsequent box scores in *Sporting Life*.¹²⁸

Back at home, Topeka hosted Leavenworth, St. Joseph, and Kansas City. They lost only one of the nine games and strengthened their position at the top of the league. In the final game, Kansas City's pitcher was 17-year-old Charles "Kid" Nichols. He began the season playing semipro baseball in Kansas City, and his first professional game had been against Lincoln on June 14. Nichols would have a 15-year career in the major leagues beginning in 1890, mostly with the Boston Beaneaters of the National League. He was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1949.¹²⁹

July was a turbulent month for the Western League. The one constant was that Goldsby's Golden Giants continued to occupy first place. They played on the road at Kansas City (including a doubleheader on July 4), Leavenworth, St. Joseph, and Denver, and at home against Lincoln, Hastings, Denver, and Omaha, winning 17 of 22 games. With a winning percentage that remained above .700 (now 55–17; .763), none of the other clubs seriously challenged them. However, the contest for second place became more competitive, until Lincoln finally took firm hold of that position (48–24; .667).¹³⁰

The problems for the Western League began with Leavenworth's financial troubles, which led the team to sell players to generate income. Future National Baseball Hall of Fame first baseman Jake Beckley was among the first to be sold to Lincoln on June 8. Several players were sold to Hastings in July. To address the problem, Western League President J.H. Threw of Lincoln called a meeting for July 7 in Lincoln. However, only the representatives from Lincoln and Omaha attended. The other clubs' representatives attended a meeting in Leavenworth called by league secretary, E.E. Murphy of Leavenworth. At that meeting, Murphy was elected president, secretary, and treasurer of the league. Undeterred, President Threw declared that decisions made in Leavenworth could not stand because it was an "illegal meeting." He called another meeting in Kansas City that ran for two days (July 19–20) and finally resolved the situation. Murphy was removed from office and replaced by R.E. McKelvy of Omaha. Threw then resigned as president and was replaced by E.E. Menges of Kansas City. The Leavenworth club was replaced by the team from Wichita in the Kansas State League to maintain a full schedule for eight teams.¹³¹ When Wichita visited Topeka at the end of August, the roster included three players from the 1886 Topeka BBC—David Butler, Jack Pettiford, and Buck (Farmer) Weaver.¹³²

Change to the Golden Giants' roster of a less disruptive nature also occurred in July. In the middle of the month, it was reported in Topeka newspapers that Norm Baker, who had been pitching that year for Rochester, New York in the International Association, was signed by Topeka. However, he did not appear in any box scores for the Golden Giants. Instead, he signed with a team in Toronto, Ontario. Baker had played for Nashville with Goldsby in 1886, so there might have been some discussion of signing him, and this could have led to a rumor he had actually been signed. Baker had trouble getting along with others and bounced from team to team and league to league, including time with three clubs in the major leagues—Pittsburgh (1883), Louisville (1885), and Baltimore (1890).¹³³

Although the Baker rumor turned out to be false, Topeka did sign a new pitcher at the end of July. Harry Dooms began the season with Leavenworth but was sold to Kansas City in June. In early July, Kansas City suspended Dooms for insubordination. At the end of the

month, after being reinstated, he was sold to Topeka. To make room for him on the roster, Topeka released Frank Hafner, whose value was fading, and this kept the number of pitchers at three—Dooms, Jim Conway, and Tom Sullivan.¹³⁴ In addition, Goldsby gave up the position as the team's on-field captain. Shortstop Jimmy Macullar had been the "Acting Captain" of the Golden Giants in early May and again during June, while Goldsby was ill. Little Mac was named the club's field captain in late July, and he held the position through the end of the season.¹³⁵

The troubles for the Western League did not end in July. On July 28, the club in St. Joseph decided to fold on August 1 due to financial shortfalls. This again left the league with seven teams and three options—add another club, play with seven clubs, or drop the recently added club from Wichita. Option one was tentatively chosen at a league meeting on August 2 after a representative of the league visited Emporia, Kansas. Like Wichita, Emporia was a member of the Kansas State League. On August 7, at a follow-up meeting in Kansas City, Wellington, Kansas, another member of the Kansas State League, also requested a chance to submit a proposal for admission to the more prestigious Western League. However, Wellington later withdrew from consideration, and Emporia was admitted as the eighth team in the Western League.¹³⁶

Why it was important to have eight teams in the Western League, when two clubs almost simultaneously withdrew late in the season seems puzzling in hindsight. Neither new club could play enough games to legitimately contest for the league championship, and it would be challenging to build a roster capable of playing at a higher level of competition so late in the season. Perhaps it was not a surprise when the league's expansion was soon reversed. Wichita disbanded after completing a series in Kansas City on September 5. By prior arrangement, Emporia was also dropped to leave the Western League with six clubs. That decision was formally taken on September 7. At the time of their departures, Wichita's record was 7–23 (.233), while Emporia's record was 4–12 (.250). These games would not be counted among the records of the remaining six clubs. A decision on whether to retain the games played by Leavenworth and St. Joseph in determining the final standings was tabled. Lincoln supported throwing out these games because it would close the gap with Topeka, but the games were ultimately retained as part of the official record.¹³⁷

Meanwhile, Topeka and Lincoln continued to outpace the rest of the league, with Denver and Kansas City vying for third place and trying to finish with a record above .500.¹³⁸ Lincoln played reasonably consistent baseball but could not gain ground on the equally consistent Golden Giants. However, Lincoln did post the most explosive offensive effort of the season. On August 8, Lincoln mercilessly defeated Wichita, 46–7, scoring 20 runs in the sixth inning. Lincoln had 50 hits (which included 6 walks), in addition to 15 Wichita errors. Based on earned runs alone, the score would have been 35–5. Despite all the runs, the game lasted only 2 hours and 45 minutes, yet the fans in Lincoln still thought Wichita played "a little too slowly." The regular league umpire was suffering from malaria, so Lincoln pitcher Park Swartzel officiated the game. The game was so lopsided, there was no complaint of him being biased toward his own team.¹³⁹

Following a game in August between the Golden Giants and the visiting Cowboys from Kansas City, a reporter for the *Topeka Capital* commented on two plays involving fly balls. One occurred in the ninth inning, with Kansas City batting, down by a single run, a runner on first base, and one out. A fly ball was hit to Goldsby in left field. He was known for his long, accurate throws, but the runner on first headed for second as soon as the ball was hit. Goldsby caught the ball and made “a quick return of the ball to first,” ending the game. In the sixth inning, it was Macullar’s running that had earned the reporter’s praise. Little Mac hit a fly ball that looked like an easy catch for Kansas City’s right fielder. Nevertheless, Macullar ran hard to first base. “Hassamaer muffed the ball and Macullar reached second, whereas if he had not run[,] the big right fielder could have recovered the ball and thrown him out at first.” The previous batter, Spud Johnson, had manufactured a run for Topeka when he singled, stole second base, reached third on an overthrow by the catcher, and scored on a wild pitch.¹⁴⁰ Goldsby’s Golden Giants kept their heads in the game and hustled—hallmarks of a club that would hold first place from the first week of the season.

During the final series in Kansas City, the *Kansas City Times* published a four-paragraph commentary on the Golden Giants under the headline, “A Good Word for Topeka.”

[Topeka] has shown beyond all cavil or doubt that it is the best club in the Western league, and heads the list of clubs by reason of superior ball playing. ... There is a vim and snap about the playing of the club, an earnestness accompanied by good teamwork, that characterizes no other club in the Western league. ... They play base ball without acting like toughs, which is something that can not be said of all the Western league clubs.¹⁴¹

Late in August, the *Topeka Capital* also offered an opinion about Goldsby’s Golden Giants. “The CAPITAL has thus far refrained from bragging about the Topeka base ball club, but it feels impelled to say that Topeka has a team that the city can be proud of.” According to the *Capital*, the Golden Giants were “thorough gentlemen” who did not “drink nor carouse” and received the “commendation” of several of Topeka’s “prominent ministers.” The reputation of the team benefitted the community. “As an advertisement for the city, Topeka could have nothing better.”¹⁴²

In late September, as the season neared its conclusion, the Golden Giants had a clinching performance against Lincoln in a series played at Topeka. On September 20, the Lincoln club was late arriving by train, so the clubs agreed to shorten the games of that day’s doubleheader to seven innings, which were later reduced to six innings due to approaching darkness. Conway pitched the first game for an 11–7 victory. In the second game, Conway was again on the mound, although there was concern his “arm would not be strong enough to last him.” It was. Though only six innings were played, he pitched a 22–0 shutout that would have been a no-hitter except that walks counted as hits. Lincoln’s number nine hitter, Park Swartzel had one walk. The following day, the two clubs played another doubleheader. This time, Sullivan pitched both games, winning the seven-inning morning contest 15–2, giving up one hit and one walk. In the afternoon, he won the six-inning game, 21–2.¹⁴³

The Western League's season was scheduled to run through October 13, but with only six clubs remaining, the season ended October 2. After Lincoln lost the two doubleheaders, it became clear Topeka would claim the pennant. In September, the Golden Giants took advantage of their secure position and released Werden to Des Moines "for a monetary consideration." Holliday and Stearns joined him after the Western League season ended. Topeka's record (excluding Emporia and Wichita games) was 83–24 (.776), including a 22-game winning streak. Two other teams were above .500—Lincoln was 62–34 (.646) and Denver was 51–49 (.510). Kansas City finished fourth but fell short of a winning record at 49–53 (.480). Omaha (36–75; .356) and Hastings (33–62; .347) settled into the last two spots. The Golden Giants wanted to play the champions of the Northwestern League in a series for the championship of the West, but it never happened.¹⁴⁴

The performance of Goldsby's Golden Giants was the most dominant in the minor leagues covered in *Sporting Life* and *Spalding's Official Base Ball Guide* (Table 5).¹⁴⁵ However, there is no way to directly compare the leagues or their champions. The record of the Golden Giants reflected circumstances solely within the Western League—the quality of their team relative to other teams in the league. It is unfortunate a postseason competition among the champions of the Western League, Northwestern League, and International League was not possible.

As individuals, the Golden Giants also performed well. Position players who had 310–605 at bats (plus Jack Kenyon with 214 at bats) compiled batting averages ranging from .304 to .464, although these numbers were inflated because walks counted as hits in 1887. The workhorses on the pitching staff were Jim Conway (32–9; 356 innings; 138 strikeouts; 41 walks) and Tom Sullivan (36–9; 396 innings pitched; 142 strikeouts; 100 walks). Conway pitched three shutouts.¹⁴⁶ The numbers of strikeouts and walks for the pitchers are not directly comparable to other years around that time because the number of strikes (four) and balls (five) required in 1887 were different. In December, each member of Goldsby's Golden Giants was awarded a "champion badge," fittingly made of gold and illustrated by a sketch in the *Topeka Capital*.¹⁴⁷

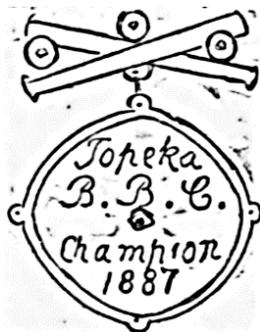


Table 5.—Top minor leagues in 1887, with the numbers of teams beginning the season (minus the number that disbanded), the league champions, and their records.

League	Clubs	Champion	Record
Western League	8 (–2)	Topeka, KS	83–24 (.776)
New England League	8 (–3)	Lowell, MA	71–33 (.683)
Ohio League	8 (–1)	Kalamazoo, MI	64–34 (.653)
Southern League	7 (–3)	New Orleans, LA	75–40 (.652)
Northwestern League	8	Oshkosh, WI	76–41 (.650)
International League	10 (–1)	Toronto, ON	65–36 (.644)

None of the players who finished the season with the Golden Giants had trouble finding positions on the rosters of minor league clubs in 1888. Goldsby became manager of the club in Birmingham, Alabama and was joined by Sullivan. They later moved up to the major league Baltimore Orioles and Kansas City Cowboys, respectively. Ardner, Conway, Gunson, and Johnson joined the minor league Kansas City Blues, while Holliday, Macullar, and Stearns played in Des Moines. Werden and Snead headed for New Orleans but played for other clubs later in the season. Werden also played briefly for the major league Washington Nationals. Jake Kenyon joined a minor league club in St. Louis.¹⁴⁸

Why was there no minor league club in Topeka in 1888? On December 15, the *Topeka Capital* published interviews with prominent boosters of the baseball club, who were asked their opinions about supporting a “first-class” professional team in 1888. “The question has been often asked but never definitely answered: ‘Will Topeka have a base ball club the coming season?’” One of the backers of the 1887 club, “a great lover of base ball,” flatly stated, “The fact is, we cannot afford it.” He told the reporter the cost of supporting Goldsby’s Golden Giants was “no less than \$12,000” (equivalent to \$328,775 in 2020). While expressing the opinion that Topeka “had the finest base ball team outside the National league and American association,” the team’s supporters had “paid well for the luxury.” This view was echoed by another baseball booster. “Topeka is yet too small to support a first-class ball team.”¹⁴⁹

Minor leagues using the name Western League were periodically organized well into the twentieth century. However, Topeka did not join another minor league until 1893. A proposal was floated to have a large league consisting of teams from Denver, Kansas City, Omaha, Pueblo, St. Joseph, Topeka, and Wichita—similar to the 1887 league. Smaller cities, such as St. Joseph and Topeka balked at the plan because of potentially high costs. Subscriptions and gate receipts would be lower in the smaller cities, so they would not be able to afford the quality of players the larger cities would hire. Consideration was then given to arranging informal schedules among the teams already organized, but talk of a minor league rose again. At a meeting in St. Joseph on May 14, Kansas City, Lawrence (Kansas), St. Joseph, and Topeka agreed to organize what is now usually referred to as the Western Association. However, there was no Western League that year, so that was the name most frequently used at the time. The four clubs were all close to each other (less than 80 miles apart), which would reduce travel costs. Games were scheduled from May 25 to September 13. Most Sunday games would be played in Kansas City and St. Joseph, the two largest cities, which would potentially generate more gate receipts. As the season progressed, a meeting was held on June 12 to discuss the addition of Des Moines and Omaha, but objections were raised. The Lawrence club disbanded only four days later, and the league folded on June 20. With few good teams nearby to play and too few spectators at the games, Topeka’s professional baseball club disbanded on June 25.¹⁵⁰ The real estate boom of the 1880s had ended and an economic depression began in 1893.¹⁵¹ A first-class professional team was a luxury Topeka was still unable to afford.

Topeka would have other minor league clubs in the following decades. In 1895, 1897, and 1898, they played in the low-level Kansas State League, which had only four teams

each year in smaller towns such as Atchison, Emporia, Junction City, Leavenworth, and Troy. The league was far enough on the margin of minor league baseball that Atchison, Emporia, and Troy could have some of the last integrated baseball teams prior to 1946. From 1904 through 1961, Topeka would field 45 minor league teams, most of which played in the Western League or Western Association. Several were good teams.¹⁵² Yet none could surpass the reputation of Goldsby's Golden Giants in 1887, and none was more historically significant than the integrated Topeka BBC of 1886.

Acknowledgements

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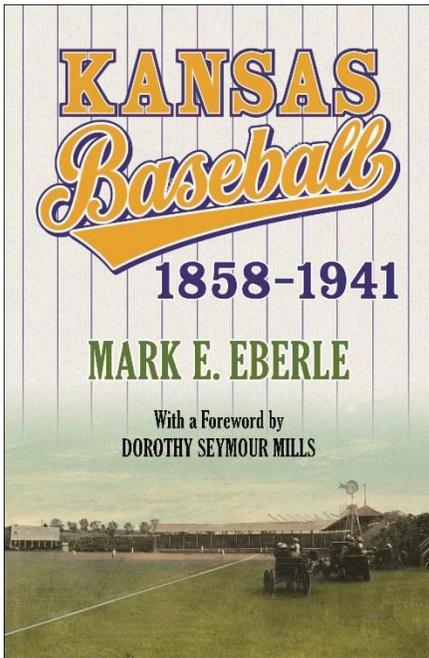
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- ⁷³ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 31 August 1886, p 4. • *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 24 August 1886, p 5.
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- ⁷⁵ *Leavenworth Standard*, 1 September 1886, p 4.

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You can learn more about the early history of baseball played by teams throughout Kansas in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of towns still playing baseball in the state's oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.